

Ying Vang, Executive Director; Yao Lo, Special Projects Director; and Mr. Kue Xiong, Special Assistant.

Mr. Speaker, I am extremely proud that Hmong veterans and their families, under the leadership of these two St. Paul-based, non-profit community organizations, helped to organize national recognition ceremonies in recent years to honor the Hmong and Lao veterans at both the Vietnam War Memorial and Arlington National Cemetery. These events were the first of their kind and attracted international media coverage. They drew thousands of people from Minnesota and across the nation to Washington, D.C. I was deeply honored to provide remarks and participate in these historic events, including the dedication of the monument at Arlington National Cemetery, which prompted the following editorial in the Washington Post which I would like to include in the RECORD at this time.

Mr. Speaker, the people of the Southeast Asian community in St. Paul are playing an increasingly positive role as they pursue education, home ownership and fill key roles in our society. Although serious challenges persist, this generation will have a magnificent impact upon shaping tomorrow's Minnesota. It is important that Congress honor their history, culture and background today.

Once again, I would like to salute all those who supported and cosponsored H.R. 371 which I plan to reintroduce during the 106th Congress.

[From the Washington Post, May 20, 1998]

DEBTS TO THE HMONG

To anyone with a memory and a commitment to keeping one's word, it is bound to come as a shock that the United States is still not fulfilling its obligations to its Hmong and Lao allies in the Vietnam War. Eleven years ago, Congress authorized the Vietnam Veterans National Medal for the now-American survivors of the secret army that helped America fight its battles in Laos in 1961-73 and that paid dearly for it. Yet only the other day was the medal actually bestowed on the few thousand veterans of that army who had gathered in Washington. In a march meant to recall their earlier escape across the Mekong River to Thailand, the Hmong group crossed the Potomac to the grave of John F. Kennedy, the first American president their units had served.

The Hmong, or "Meo," and Lao recruits formed under CIA direction at a time when their very presence and role were officially denied. Diverting large numbers of North Vietnamese soldiers from their primary (American) targets, the secret army gathered intelligence, protected U.S. navigational sites and rescued hundreds of downed American pilots. In turn, the United States took on specific protective obligations and of course an overwhelming moral obligation. These debts were fulfilled only raggedly when Communist North Vietnam swept over Laos. Hmong and Lao soldiers and the families were alternately repressed by the victorious forces and forced into exile. Some 135,000 now live in the United States.

Their current complaints go well beyond the tardy receipt of medals for their valor. A concern for their kin has made them advocates of an American policy to press the Laotian government harder to ensure fair treatment for those left behind and to begin Hmong-language broadcasts on the now American-supported Radio Free Asia. They also protest the recent immigration-law changes that limit benefits to non-citizens, including elderly Hmong who have been un-

able to learn English for the citizenship exam.

In Arlington Cemetery, the Hmong unveiled a memorial to their combat veterans and American advisers. In the Lao and Hmong languages the writing on the monument states, "You will never be forgotten." They almost were.

OPERATION PROVIDE COMFORT IN IRAQ

HON. LAMAR S. SMITH

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, October 20, 1998

Mr. SMITH of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I rise today regarding a very important bipartisan issue that will need to be addressed in the 106th Congress, that is compensating the families of the Americans who were killed on April 14, 1994 while serving in Operation Provide Comfort over Iraq.

Mr. Speaker, I have been very disappointed by the Pentagon's handling of this issue and their refusal to treat fairly the families of the American service personnel who were killed on this incident. I have several constituents whose loved one was killed in this incident and I am disappointed that the Department of Defense has not treated them more fairly.

On April 14, 1994, 15 Americans, 14 military personnel and 1 civilian, and 11 foreign nationals, were killed when two Army Black Hawk helicopters, were shot down over the "No Fly zone" in Iraq by two Air Force F-15's. According to the General Accounting Office, this loss of life resulted from 130 separate mistakes by the Air Force and the Army. After this incident, the Department of Defense made \$100,000 ex gratia payments to the families of the foreign nationals in addition to the other death benefits they received from their own countries. While making these payments to the foreign families, the Administration was unwilling to give the same treatment to the next of kin of the Americans.

My subcommittee held a hearing on this issue on June 18, 1998 and heard from both the Pentagon and the families. Before the hearing, I requested the Pentagon be prepared to answer whether authority exists under current law to compensate the families at the same level as the foreign families. During their testimony, the Pentagon was unable to provide a credible answer for why they did not treat the Americans in the same matter as the foreign families. First, they could not answer whether they had the authority to make the payments to the Americans, then after the hearing, when the Department did provide the Subcommittee with a response they did not answer the direct question posed. Rather than providing a statutory bar to payment under Section 127 of Title 10, the Department's response discusses "limitations that have historically been applied" and "compelling reasons against making such payments".

It would appear that historical applications and compelling reasons were compromised when the Department chose to make ex gratia payments to the families of foreign nationals killed in the same incident with Americans. By doing so, the Department has placed the Government in the position of appearing to value foreign nationals lives more than American lives.

It is clear that some remedy must be affected to rectify the inequities created by the actions taken by the Department in this incident. Our service personnel deserve to be treated better. I have been working with Congressmen COLLINS, CONYERS, and WATT of North Carolina to fashion a bipartisan solution to this problem.

The Subcommittee did not have time to act this year, but we will revisit this issue next year. I hope that the Pentagon will correct this injustice and make the payments to the families without Congress having to take action. However, if the Administration is not willing to act, the Immigration and Claims Subcommittee will consider legislation in the 106th Congress to give the American families the same treatment as the foreign families received.

PERSONAL EXPLANATION

HON. DANNY K. DAVIS

OF ILLINOIS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, October 20, 1998

Mr. DAVIS of Illinois. Mr. Speaker, I was unavoidably detained in the district on October 13th and 14th. As a result, I missed rollcall votes 527-531. If I had been present, I would have voted "aye" on rollcall 527, "nay" on rollcall 528, "aye" on rollcall 529, "nay" on rollcall 530 and "aye" on rollcall 531.

THANK YOU MR. BRENT AYER

HON. BART GORDON

OF TENNESSEE

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, October 20, 1998

Mr. GORDON. Mr. Speaker, today I want to pay tribute to the career of Mr. Brent Ayer. Brent has served my office in the capacity of Chief of Staff for two years; however, he has served the United States House of Representatives loyally for twenty-one.

As Chief of Staff, Brent has performed his duties with meticulous skill and care. His ability to organize and prioritize keeps the office running like clockwork. Brent is a true asset to my staff, providing a level of leadership and wisdom that could only be gained through twenty-one years of service.

How best to describe twenty-one years on Capitol Hill other than stating the obvious point that Brent is the kind of employee rarely seen this day-and-age in the workforce. He is the consummate Capitol Hill staffer and a model for anyone wishing to answer the call of service to his country and Congress.

Brent's tenure in the House of Representatives began in the office of Rep. Goodloe Byron, where he was hired as a staff assistant in 1977. He stayed on with Rep. Beverly Byron after Goodloe's death and advanced to Chief of Staff.

Brent's career path moved from Rep. Byron's office to Rep. RON KLUNK in 1994 and, finally to work for me.

Brent has a well-earned reputation for untangling really tangled messes. No task is too large or too small for him to handle. Whether Brent is attending a White House signing ceremony for legislation he helped his boss push through or defending a two-year-old child with Leukemia against a large health insurance company, he handles his duties with ease.